

MAKING WIDER USE OF MASS MEDIA IN EXTENSION WORK

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The word painters of Superman and Superwoman might well take their models from extension agents, for I know of no other occupation that demands more qualifications of its employees. You are expected to be an authority on countless subjects, and so, I feel no hesitancy in appearing before you and urging you to step up your activity in the field of information by making wider use of mass media in the promotion of your programs.

Some of the greatest exponents of the use of mass media are our industrial concerns. This is true of the manufacturers of cigarettes, soft drinks, and other products.

You, too, have a product to sell--education. You have countless messages to carry to many Garcias, and if you employ the use of mass media guns you can make progress in the battle of ignorance. In contrast with the commercial peddlers, you do not have to spend millions to put your product before the public. You get "for free" what others cannot even buy. So, isn't it pretty obvious that you should turn to these informational tools to help you to promote your product?

There is one criticism of Extension that one hears pretty frequently and that is that you don't reach enough people. You know there is a limit to the number of people you personally can reach, but there is no limit where you employ mass media to help you get the job done, according to a survey conducted by the U.S.D.A. Of course, I hesitate to refer to surveys because some of their conclusions are as fallacious as one I heard over the radio recently. This man related that according to a survey recently made it was found that the average Yale graduate had two children and the average married Vassar graduate had three children. His conclusion was that it only goes to show that women have more children than men.

Well, to get back to the Department of Agriculture survey, it was found that people who have as many as nine exposures to information react the greatest. So you can't content yourselves with simply writing a news story. You need to use the radio, circular letters, demonstrations, exhibits, bulletins, visual aids, and so on.

Now let's take a look at the news story.--The neophyte or novice needs some sort of guidance when he first starts to write. We are aware of the fact that people seem to freeze when they get pencils in their hands. In fact, when you say "write" to a group your message carries just as repellent a connotation as if you put up such signs as "contagious disease," or "mad dog inside." They do not hesitate to express their thoughts conversationally. Now, why do they hesitate to write?

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I'll tell you: It is purely psychological. Most of them think that writing is some God-given talent conferred upon a chosen few. That is not true. Believe me, there is no magic, no legerdemain, no rabbit-in-the-hat, hocus-pocus about this business of writing. It lies within the power of everyone who has something to say to be able to write.

Whether it's playing the violin or juggling three balls, it takes practice. So, obviously you must learn to write by writing. Even Shakespeare had to learn to write. Miss Marchetta Chute says in her fabulous story about the Bard, that his first plays were not great successes. She says he did just what every other writer has done: He learned to write by writing.

To help make this task of writing easier for you we would like to introduce you to a recipe for writing. It is composed of six interrogative words: Who? What? When? Where? How? and Why? Think for a minute. Is there any fact connected with any situation that doesn't fall into one of these categories? I have made this challenge before many audiences and, up to now, not one person has answered this challenge.

Then, if we concede that our ingredients are these, we will have an imperfect product if we leave out some of them. The analogy I wish to draw is this: Try leaving out the baking powder of the biscuits, or the salt, or whatever goes into biscuits. You see how limited I am, culinarily speaking. In fact, I would hate to have to whip up a batch of biscuits. I shudder to think what I would come forth with. But -- give me a few trials at the recipe. Let me get my hands in the dough. Just let me practice. Finally, I'll emerge with an edible product.

So it is with this writing recipe. The first paragraph is the most important part of your news story. In journalese we call the first paragraph the lead. The function of the lead is to give a synopsis or summary of the story. This style is in great contrast with short-story or fictional style. In that type of writing we build atmosphere, such as: "On a dark and stormy night the villain, mounted on a fiery steed, came dashing down Main Street. He grabbed the blonde and unsuspecting heroine by the hair of her head and dragged her through the streets as onlookers stood aghast. At the end of Main Street he murdered her."

Now in the news story the murder would come first! In order to put the most important event at the beginning of your lead you must sift through your data, applying the measuring stick.

The Feature.--Just how you start your story will determine largely how many readers you will have. In other words you must have good bait to catch readers. Another analogy we use is to liken the feature to the main show window of a store. Merchants put quality goods in main show windows on Main Street because more people will pass there.

How to determine quality goods.--Possibly an illustration I used to use on journalism freshmen at Louisiana State University might help you in measuring your material. I would relate the story about one of the students staying in his room because of a slight indisposition. His roommates, realizing that the "shut-in" will want to know the news, check the main bulletin board on the campus. (L.S.U. is so large that messages are conveyed by means of bulletin

boards.) They read the following items on the board: (1) lecture on existentialism at 10:30; (2) showing of foreign film at 1:30; (3) dress parade at 4 o'clock; (4) holiday tomorrow; (5) award of athletic medals at 8 o'clock. Now, out of all this material they do some unconscious editing and the first thing they say to the shut-in is -- "Holiday tomorrow."

If you will keep that story in the foreground of your memory, it should help you in evaluating your material. When you select the feature you will see then that it is bound to be one of the interrogative words of the recipe. It has to be.

You recall we said all facts fall into one of these categories. If you use one of the ingredients, what then happens to the others? Obviously they must be included in the lead. When you include all in the lead, then the lead necessarily fulfills its mission. Answering all the six interrogative words will give you a summary or a synopsis of the story. You won't be satisfied with your maiden ventures, but if you will stick to this business of writing you, too, will emerge from this experience with a very edible editorial product.

Let's turn our attention to the radio.--The radio is a powerful medium for the dissemination of information. (1) You can reach people in their homes. They don't have to go out to hear you. They don't have to purchase a paper. (2) You can give the people the news while it is new because of the immediacy of the radio. You don't have to wait to get it into print, or have it mimeographed. You can reach your listeners with virtually no expense.

Radio stations are not obligated to give time to public-service programs, but it is understood that they will. So, feel no hesitancy in asking for radio time. According to the latest figures, 95 percent of the Nation's families own 90 million radio sets. What is the radio census in your own particular area? Whatever you find, the number will be impressive enough to indicate to you that you cannot bypass this important medium.

There is a well-defined radio technique--a recipe for this, too. It has many common denominators with the news story. Style is the chief difference. Newspaper stories are written in the third person, rather formal style, while radio scripts, talks, and so on, are best presented through use of the second person.

The "you" appeal is your best technique--the informal. Never forget that in speaking over the radio it is a matter of your talking individually to every "you" listening in. Obviously, you must make your message into something the "you's" want to hear, not something you want to give. It is a matter or an attitude on the part of the listener of "what's this to me, coach? How does it affect me?" It is just how adroitly you handle your subject matter that will keep your audience glued to the station over which you are speaking. The button can be switched very easily, you know.

Now, I don't wish to terrify you, but don't ignore these exhortations.

Television is fast rearing its potent head.--Extension must be ready to use that important medium, too. It would be redundant for me to expound on the value of seeing as well as hearing. Television has a recipe, too. Learn it and practice it.

Now the circular letter.--The circular letter is a quick and inexpensive means of reaching special groups of farm people. The circular letter has one advantage over the news story in that it makes a more direct appeal. However the two are not competitive. Too often we fail to give sufficient thought and planning to our circular letters. As a result we find them in the wastepaper baskets. The motivation back of the writing of a circular letter is the need and not the fear of criticism from the higher-ups.

Plan your circular letter. Obtain a good, appropriate illustration. It must be related to subject matter. The old method of willy-nilly selecting a drawing to liven up your letter is a bad practice. The picture must be functional. Of course we are all familiar with the old Chinese proverb, "One picture is worth 10,000 words." It must be a good and an appropriate one. Don't give the impression that it was lugged in for decorative purposes or to fill up space.

There are two types of circular letters: (1) The announcement and (2) the subject-matter letter. Decide which yours will be--then write.

The salutation can set the whole tone of the letter. Don't be too formal. Don't be too breezy. Don't use plurals, "friends," etc.

Don't start your opening paragraph with the present indicative -- "I have not written you in a long time . . ." So what? "I have something of importance..." "I know this is a problem..." Take the emphasis off of I. Put it on you.

Closing must be on the same note as opening. Avoid using "trusting" -- "hoping." These words put the emphasis on the writer. It should be on the recipient.

Be careful of the letter's physical aspects: (1) Hold letter to one page; long letters arouse resistance; (2) use short sentences--16 to 18 words; (3) don't send out a messy letter; (4) have good proportion; (5) see that the secretary executes it well; (6) avoid misspelled words; (7) use good quality paper and ink; (8) leave adequate margins; (9) don't strike over; (10) give letter as much glamour as possible.

Writing columns.--A very effective way for agents to win the friendship and support of their clientele is through the issuance of columns. These columns must appear with clocklike regularity, for people get into the habit of looking for special material such as columns. Spasmodic appearance of columns will not do the job for the agent. Hammer! Hammer!

There are two kinds of columns: (1) informal and (2) formal. The writer's or agent's personality and leanings must be the determining factor in deciding which type of column he will write.

The informal column is characterized by a chatty, light, and conversational tone. It is written just about the way the agent would talk to his people. This column is personalized and it includes the names of many people, whom the agent is serving in some capacity. It does not, as a rule, contain straight news information.

When it has the how-to-do aspect in the story, the information is customarily given through the experience of some farm person who has already put the information into practice. For instance: It's spring! Some tidying up of the farm

is necessary. Folks need a whitewash formula. You get the information across by mentioning that Cy Hicks has been tidying up his place. There is a lot of fresh whitewash around the place. Cy used this formula when he mixed his wash. Then you give the formula. You can readily see that this is a more subtle way of getting information over to your people.

Readers get tired of that old approach: "Now is the time to clean up the farm," or "you farm folks should be tidying up your farms." When readers learn that old Cy Hicks has been improving his farmstead, they then begin to think of their own situations in the light of what Cy has done. That old attitude of "if Cy can do it, why can't I?" asserts itself.

A talk with the editor and an agreement with him about the type of column you will run would be a good way for determining the style of your column. The format will also be determined by the editor. Perhaps your column will have only a one-column spread; maybe two or three. I would suggest that the column head have some standard identification: Possibly a thumbnail picture of the author, or a farm or home scene. The cut made should fit the size of the column. Possibly a catchy heading should be used, like Old MacDonald on the farm, or the name of the agent.

Too many agents let the self-conscious bee get into their bonnets. They feel abashed over publicizing themselves. That is misplaced ego. If they could just sell themselves the idea that the position they hold is the open Sesame, and not their names, they would lose this artificial timidity. Say you are an agent today in Slack Parish. Your name, with the title, suggests authority today. Say tomorrow you would resign and automatically lose your title, just how much weight then would your name have?

We will now turn our attention to bulletins.--Whether you write bulletins or read them, or use them as source material for how-to-do type of story, you realize that the predominating note should be simplicity. The day has long passed when bulletin authors spent their time and effort writing for fellow scientists rather than for those on the production line. No longer is a writer judged by the many-syllabled and unfamiliar words he uses. Readability straightened us out on this.

As a source of material the bulletins furnish editorial fodder for two types of stories: (1) announcement and (2) advice--How-to-do. You're missing a bet if your nose for news doesn't start itching when new bulletins reach you. Do you realize that the average extension service spends between twenty to forty thousand dollars annually on bulletins? Isn't it rather frightening the casual way we regard them? The best way to make sure that the public gets the information is through distribution, yes, but the number is so limited: Use mass media.

Visual aids tell the story.--We in the educational field have lagged behind in utilizing visual aids as a fine tool to help us get messages across to the people whom we serve. It is true we learned the value of this quick method of imparting information from the last world war when we saw the Armed Forces going all out with visual aids to hasten the training of their men. We have advanced some, but we are still too timid about using them.

We must always keep in mind the fact that our hand of education is primarily voluntary. We feel that our subject matter is sound and well organized. It

must additionally be done up in attractive packages. This has long been recognized by commercial people. They have used visual aids to great advantage. If they didn't pay off you wouldn't find the commercial boys using them. Their economics just don't work that way. These commercial companies are using 2x2 slides, motion pictures, displays, exhibits, posters, and other visual aids. They have found out that an investment of part of their budget in visual aids pays handsome dividends.

We in the educational world also have a selling job to do. Our product, of course, is noncommercial. We should use visual aids tailored to our programs. There are many opinions on what constitutes a visual aid. We like to think of it as being any device used to present or assist in the presentation of ideas by the sense of sight. Its function is to arouse and hold interest so that learning is accomplished swiftly, efficiently, and thoroughly.

Visual aids are many and varied. Their application is limited only by the ingenuity of their user. The more commonly used ones are movies, slides, film-strips, pictures, graphs, charts, posters, models, specimens, blackboards, and flannel boards. Each of these aids can be used in many variations.

The Spartans loathed talkativeness. Once a neighboring island was struck by a famine. An envoy was sent to Sparta to plead for help. The Spartans sent him back empty-handed, saying, "We have forgotten the beginning of your speech and we understood nothing of the end." Another envoy was sent. He took along empty bags and opening one said, "It is empty. Please fill it." All the bags were promptly filled to overflowing. But the envoy was warned, "You need not have pointed out to us that your bags were empty, we would have seen it. It was not necessary to ask us to fill them, we would have done that. When you come again, don't talk so much."

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